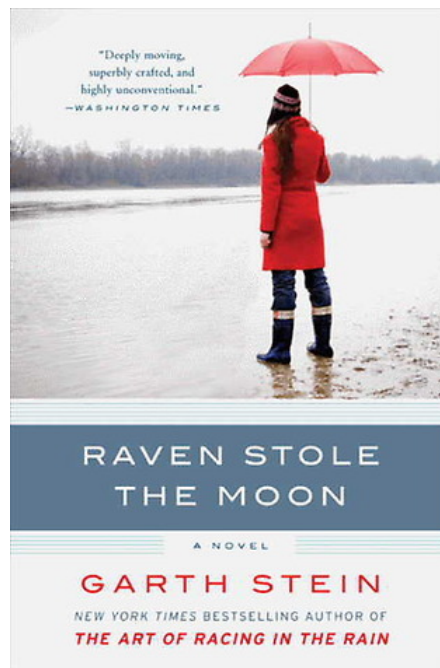




Raven Stole the Moon

Garth Stein

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Raven Stole the Moon Garth Stein

On impulse, Jenna Rosen leaves the party she and her real estate developer husband, Robert, are attending in Seattle, takes his BMW and drives north to Bellingham. Again on impulse, she hops on the ferry to the Alaskan town where her Tlingit Indian grandmother lived and died. But there's more than impulse at work here: Jenna and Robert's 5-year-old son, Bobby, drowned in Alaska just two years ago, and something is drawing Jenna back to the scene. On the ferry, she's given a carved silver charm of a Tlingit spirit called a kushtaka, a stealer of souls. "Tlingits don't have good and evil," a local shaman explains, telling the story of how the spirit known as Raven gave the world the sun, moon, and stars by stealing them from someone else. As Jenna learns more about the kushtakas, helped by this very sophisticated shaman and an understanding fisherman, she begins to believe that her son's soul is being held captive by these spirits, as revenge for her husband's greed. Garth Stein's persuasive prose draws us into a book that mixes fantasy with tragedy and the natural human desire for closure.

Raven Stole the Moon Details

Date : Published March 2nd 2010 by Harper Paperbacks (first published April 1st 1998)

ISBN :

Author : Garth Stein

Format : Kindle Edition 466 pages

Genre : Fiction, Mystery, Contemporary, Suspense

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From Reader Review Raven Stole the Moon for online ebook

Cheryl says

Ever since the drowning her heir son, Bobby two years ago, Jenna Rosen and her husband, Robert are more like strangers than husband and wife. Jenna decides to get away from her life and Robert for a while. She takes off for Alaska. This is where it all began. Where Bobby drowned. Jenna experiences some strange things like...a wolf or wolf type dog chases her through the woods. Jenna meets a man named David. He is a shaman. He tells Jenna of a legend that the Tlingits believe. It has to do with the belief that not all people die peacefully, so people's souls are trapped to wither wander aimlessly or take form in another being. What does this have to do with Bobby? Could this mean that he might be alive after all?

Raven Stole the Moon is the first book I have read by Garth Stein. I have wanted to try his work out when I first heard about *The Art of Racing in the Rain* but just haven't gotten around to it. After reading this book, I definitely plan to check the book out. I have to admit that I did get a little lost at first trying to figure out in my mind about how the shaman and the Tlingit beliefs really played a part in this story and Jenna's son's death. Once I put it all straight, I was able to fully sit back and immerse myself in this book. I found that I absolutely was delighted with this book as well as Mr. Stein's writing style. He really brought the characters to life on an emotional level that made you connect with them in the moment. I only have one last comment to make and that is... you have got to check *Raven Stole the Moon* for yourself.

Chelsea says

Raven Stole the Moon by Garth Stein was sent to me as an ARC by Terra Communications, and I couldn't be more grateful for just how wonderful the book was! One of my biggest issues with accepting ARCs is the pull between being honest about the review and still doing service to the group asking for the review. With this book, however, that won't at all be a problem!

The story takes place in Wrangell, Alaska, primarily, amongst the Tlingit Native American population. Now, this is completely serendipitous because, as of late, a friend of mine, Gingerboy, has begun telling me more and more about his own Native American roots, setting me on a little bit of an obsessive path – I've been reading all the Native American short stories and legends I can get my hands on lately. This story focuses primarily on the myth of the kushtaka, spirits that are half-otter, half-human and exist to "save" the drowning (or other wayward souls) by taking them into their spirit world and converting them into kushtaka. However, once a kushtaka, the person's soul can never cross into the Land of Dead Souls, which is the worst possible fate for the Tlingit, who believe in reincarnation of the soul, but only from the Land of Dead Souls.

The book tells the story of Jenna and Robert, whose son drowns at a resort that's about to be opened on Tlingit ground. Two years later, Jenna returns to Wrangell (for the first time since her son Bobby's death) to confront this loss and, along the way finds a spirit guide a dog named Oscar, a love in a man named Eddie, and an adventure between the spirit worlds facilitated by a brave and crafty shaman David Livingstone ("Dr. Livingstone, I presume..." for all those African history buffs out there!) The novel tackles head-on the line between a culture's local legends and its realities, and just how hard it can be to overcome our own human cynicism and believe something that may be unbelievable but is right in front of us, none the less.

The novel had absolutely wonderful moments – Stein's writing style is absolutely wonderful to get lost in – and, surprisingly enough, the book does a remarkable job at staying grounded in as much reality as possible.

When you have a book that features an old shaman burrowing underground to the home of soul-stealing otter-people, it can become very easily for that book to become completely removed from reality. But Stein's emotions and slow evolution of the story keeps that from happening.

However, there were a few small issues I had with the book (although these really are more matters of taste than any kind of concrete issues with the book). The first of which is that, by the end of the book, Jenna doesn't end up with the person I would've liked her to. Stein did such a great job of pushing other narrative boundaries (his writing, at times, borders on stream-of-consciousness and the twists he gives his metaphors are almost always unexpected) that it would've been nice to seem him try and branch out of this one last expected plot device.

I also had a few issues with the intelligence of some of the characters, especially in relation to being able to recognize a kushtaka. Part of the charm of the kushtaka is that they can take on the shape of people that you know and love. Everyone seems to know this about them. And yet, all the time, the characters of the novel are randomly and blindly following people they "know" out into dark moonlit nights along creepy paths. Because that's not weird at all? Just one of those things that by about the fifteenth time gets to be a bit too much.

All in all, the book was a wonderful read and did a great job of taking me to small-town Alaska, where life is governed by a different set of beliefs and societal rules. Stein's writing will wrap you up and, while the book didn't fly by, it's middling pace wasn't at all a problem!

Alison says

Haunting and touching without being overly sentimental.

When a real estate developer, John Fergusen, wanted to build Thunder Bay Resort near the town of Klawock, Alaska, an area rich in Native American culture, he was advised to seek the counsel of a Tlingit shaman by the name of David Livingstone to "spiritually cleanse" the area on which the resort was to be built. This was to keep them from a "situation"...although not sure if he is referring to "a lawsuit-type situation or The Shining-type situation?"

Despite David Livingstone's recommendation "to abandon the Thunder Bay project immediately," Fergusen buried the warning and went ahead with a pre-opening weekend to get investors interested in the resort - a weekend that resulted in the drowning of a little boy. Tragic accident or unhappy spirits?

Two years later, Jenna, the mother of the little boy, left a dinner party in Seattle and kept on driving until she ended up in Alaska. Is she running away? Is she looking for answers? Is she looking for her son? Is she looking for her own past in her grandmother's old home? Is she looking for peace? Is she looking for love? Whatever Jenna thought she might have been looking for, she finds more than she bargained for.

There was a part of me that heard echoes of Poltergeist (building on sacred land) and feared that Raven Stole the Moon was going to take an absurd turn, but I got caught up in the storyline and welcomed the Native American folklore. The stories about Raven were really cool. Native Americans have a story for everything in order to find meaning in nature. Raven gave us the moon, the sun and the stars, but not without sacrifice.

In fact, I enjoyed the stories of Raven even more than the present-day story of Jenna and her quest for truth and acceptance. When the two stories collide, Garth Stein does an amazing job of keeping everything both heartfelt and mysterious, with just a touch of the supernatural. This had the potential of becoming a big mess, but in fact, what starts out as a frayed story, comes together in the end.

Raven Stole the Moon is Garth Stein's first novel, which was news to me, as I had only read *The Art of Racing in the Rain*, which I loved. When I was asked to read and review another of Stein's novels, first, last or middle, it didn't matter, I jumped at the chance. *Raven Stole the Moon* did not knock my socks off like *The Art of Racing in the Rain* did, but Stein did not disappoint either. This novel has been out of print, but has been re-released and is now available in paperback. Stein is a wonderful storyteller, and blends a modern heartbreaking tale with Native American folklore beautifully.

Diane says

Having absolutely loved Garth Stein's, [[ASIN:0061565407 *The Art of Racing in the Rain* CD]], I wanted to read his 1998 debut novel: *Raven Stole the Moon*. It was good, but honestly, not my cup of tea.

About the book.....

Two years ago in a remote Alaskan village, Jenna Rosen's five-year-old son, Bobby, fell out of a boat and drowned, and Jenna was unable to save him. Unable to come to terms with her grief and sinking deeper and deeper into depression, Jenna leaves her husband in Seattle and returns to the site of the tragedy. Hoping to get some closure, once there, she encounters an assortment of sinisterly quirky characters and learns much about the Indian part of her heritage. She soon comes to a startling conclusion.

Since I have never been one to enjoy myth, legend, or fantasy, this story started to lose me when its focus involved: Tlingit Legend---that the kushtaka are shape-shifting soul stealers who inhabit a kind of twilight region between the living and the dead. To me, I would have preferred that the story stay focused, more on grieving and coming to terms with loss.

Nadia says

Garth Stein's third novel, *The Art of Racing in the Rain*, was a huge success. It was so successful, that I do believe a movie is being made as a result. In order to capitalize on Stein's success, his publishers have decided to re-release his first novel. Originally published in 1998, *Raven Stole the Moon*, tells the story of Jenna Rosen. Two years ago at the Thunder Bay Resort, near Wrangell, Alaska (the hometown of her Native American grandmother), Jenna's young son, Bobby, disappeared. She has no idea what happened to him, let alone what happened to his soul. Unable to let go of her grief, Jenna suddenly decides that she must go back to Wrangell. And she must go now. Leaving her husband at a party they were attending together, Jenna hops into their car and soon finds herself heading towards her past. Once in Wrangell, Jenna becomes involved with a local fisherman, gets threatened by the Kushtakas (spirits that steal souls) and schooled about the Kushtakas by a shaman. She soon realizes that Bobby's soul has been captured by the Kushtakas and she must now find a way to aid Bobby's soul to the Land of the Dead Souls, where he will finally be able to rest.

Stein has created a novel that is both interesting and engaging. We have the undying love of a mother, Native American legends, a marriage riddled with grief and unhappiness and the Alaskan wilderness. Jenna Rosen is a character that you can't help but befriend. You feel her sadness and want her to pull through this journey of

rescue, because not only is she saving her son's soul, but she is also saving herself in the process. The rest of the characters in the book are written so vividly and accurately, that you can easily visualize them. In fact, it is through these textured characters that we are introduced to the various Tlingit legends, which I believe helped make the spiritual aspect of the novel accessible. As for the Alaskan backdrop, Stein has clearly captured the wilderness and small town feel of Wrangell. The tone and strength of Stein's writing and voice are well defined in this debut novel. In fact, I believe that from the first page of the novel, Stein easily draws you into Jenna Rosen's world. You want to find out why this woman is thinking about drowning herself in the tub and why the notion of survival instinct is inherent in her thoughts. How did Jenna Rosen get to this mindset?

Raven Stole the Moon is definitely a book that I would highly recommend. It is not my usual book fare, but I am truly glad that I decided to give it a go. Based on this book, I will be picking up Stein's other works and adding them to my TBR list.

Jennifer says

Story Overview

On the surface, Jenna Rosen has it all: a husband who loves her, a comfortable life in Seattle, and good looks. But Jenna is troubled; it shows in her excessive drinking, Valium addiction, depression and the increasing discord in her marriage. But her problems can all be traced back to the loss of her son Bobby, who drowned during a family vacation in Alaska two years ago. Jenna blames herself for Bobby's death and cannot get past it. Yet her husband Robert seems to have been able to put the past to rest. One night at a party, Jenna gets in Robert's car and keeps on driving. Her trip leads her to Bellingham, WA, where she impulsively boards the ferry that will take her to Wrangell, Alaska—a small town where her Native American grandmother lived and close to the Thunder Bay Resort where Bobby died.

Once in Wrangell, things happen that lead her to believe that something is calling her to discover the truth about Bobby's death. Her grandmother's Tlingit ancestry begins to manifest itself in strange and frightening ways. As Jenna begins to explore the Tlingit legends of the kushtaka, she begins to believe that Bobby's death was no accident. Determined to find the truth, Jenna embarks on a quest to discover what really happened at Thunder Bay. The result is a terrifying but liberating journey into the heart of the Alaska wilderness and the ancient legends of the Tlingits.

My Thoughts

Contrary to what you might think, this isn't a new book by Garth Stein, author of the best-selling *Art of Racing in the Rain* (which is on my TBR list for later this year). Rather, this is a rerelease of his first novel, which was published in 1998. (Note to authors: If your first book is not very successful, keep on trying. You may score later on and then get a rerelease for your earlier books!) *Raven Stole the Moon* has been out of print for several years, but is being rereleased on March 9. Remember how I told you I was reading a mystery book that I couldn't talk about? This was it!

Anyway, on to my thoughts about the book. I have mixed feelings about this book. On the one hand, I enjoy stories of ancient legends coming to life in our modern world, and I thought the sections dealing with the kushtaka were disturbing and frightening at times. (Let me tell you, after reading this book, I won't look at otters quite the same way again!) On the other hand, I had some issues with the tone and writing in the book. In many ways, the book is told in a very plain, straightforward way: She did this. Then she did that. He reacted this way. Then the author mixes in some stream-of-consciousness stuff that I found a bit jarring. Here

is a small example:

She got off the freeway in Bellingham feeling tired and hungry. She pulled into a gas station to get some fuel for the Machine, and she picked up some Corn Nuts and a Coke—fuel for herself. The trip suddenly had the feeling of an all-night drive. Standing under a canopy of fluorescent bulbs. Artificial sunlight. Electrified reality. Everyone would be asleep if they weren't plugged in.

My other quibble was that I thought the emotional lives of characters could have been better developed. We know Jenna is devastated by the loss of her son because the author tells us, but I never really felt it from Jenna herself. For me, this kept the book from being more than a competently told story with some supernatural elements. I think with a little more work and polishing, this book could have been something special. However, in the end, I think it falls shy of the mark.

My Final Recommendation

If you enjoy books with supernatural elements related to Native American culture, this would be a good read for you. The Tlingit legends and story line were the most compelling part of the story for me, and the descriptions of the kushtaka were interesting and a bit frightening. Although the writing is competent and the story moves along quickly, I didn't think it was unforgettable or out of the ordinary. For this reason, I'm giving it 3 stars.

Amy says

This book was kind of a chore to get through. I started out really liking it, but the writing was so choppy, with awkward tense and point of view changes that drove me insane. Also, it was way too long.

Emily Crow says

I really expected to like this book. The premise is fantastic; the story begins with a Tlingit shaman, David Livingstone, being hired to ensure that the land around a posh wilderness resort is clear of spirits. The contractor tells him, "We don't want to move ahead and find out later that we have a...uh, you know...a situation." Says David, "A lawsuit-type situation, or *The Shining*-type situation?" As it turns out, the land is the domain of some particularly dangerous nature spirits, the kushtaka, who are shape-shifters that steal human souls. After a particularly creepy scene, David announces that they'll just have to move their resort elsewhere, but that would be too expensive, so the contractor ignores his warning. Disaster soon strikes, and a little boy from Seattle drowns when his parents visit.

Fast forward two years. The grieving couple, Jenna and Robert, are not doing very well. Their marriage is falling apart, and Jenna is depressed and has struggled with substance abuse. One night, on impulse, she decides to go to Alaska on her own and try to find some closure about her son's death. Then she learns about the kushtaka. Seriously, how could this story not be fantastic?

Well, it wasn't. There were some good scenes--enough that I rated the book two stars instead of one--but for the most part, the story slowly and tediously died beneath the weight of its clunky and cumbersome prose. One mark of good writing is the author's ability to "show, don't tell," but alas, Stein rarely shows (the

aforementioned few good scenes are proof that he is capable of better), and instead tells and tells and *tells*. Not just once or twice, either; this novel is brutally repetitive.

My other main gripe about the writing was how Stein, who seems far more enamored of his characters--especially the precious Jenna--than I ever was, burdens the narrative with pages and pages of dull backstory and detailed scenes of Jenna doing pretty much nothing. With these removed, the book would be lightened of at least a third of its pages, and far more compelling for it.

This is bad enough at the beginning, causing the novel to bog down before it even has a chance to fly, but it's even worse when it interrupts any sort of suspense once the story's in progress. In one example, Jenna's taking a flight in a small plane to look for the shaman, when we take a page and a half long detour to her first time in a small plane, when she went to St Barth's on vacation. (No, it isn't relevant to the story. At all.) Then she arrives and is asking about the shaman, when we're interrupted once again by two pages where she discusses literature and remembers her old professor--"A friend of Jenna's slept with him. They went to his place and got real drunk and then they did it. She said he sucked in bed. He was constantly giving orders. He wanted this, he wanted that. She said it was boring. She only liked guys who went down on her and stayed down. She got an A, Jenna got a B minus." WTF does that have to do with anything?? It didn't influence her direction in life, the randy prof and the drunken friend don't show up in the denouement, getting that B-minus isn't what made her a drunken pill-popper for several chapters of backstory. It's just random dullness and now I don't care if she ever finds the shaman, either. I don't care if she saves her son's soul from the kushtakas. I don't care if she reconciles with her husband. I just want the random thoughts of Jenna to stop, once and for all.

It's really unfortunate, because with a ruthless editor, this could have been a decent novel. There's a good story buried in there somewhere, and the Tlingit legends and folklore are fascinating.

NOTE: This is a review of the original publication of this book, which I purchased at a used book store. I see that he has released a revised edition, and I don't know how many changes were made.

Jackie says

This is a slightly updated re-release of Stein's first novel originally published in 1996 and out of print for some time. Don't expect any Enzo-like characters here--this book is TERRIFYING, a flat out, brilliantly crafted horror story. Stein is a "blood quantum verified" registered member of the Tlingit Indian Tribe of Alaska (his great-grandmother was full blooded Tlingit), and he has taken one of their more terrifying legends and brought it to the modern world. This is a story about Kushtakas, otter spirit shapeshifters who steal souls from people found alone in the woods and waters near Klawock and Wrangell Alaska. Two years ago when Jenna's young son drowned in Thunder Bay, she had not heard the legends. But with her world falling apart around her in Seattle, Jenna decides to go back to Alaska and try to find peace. What she finds is a nightmare that leaves her fighting for her own life and soul. The writing in this book is masterful--I spent no small amount of time curled up in a ball keeping a wary eye on the windows and door locks while reading it. And the last 40 pages--I pretty much forgot to breathe. Yes, it's THAT good.

Christine (booktumbling) says

Robert and Jenna - the couple with everything. That is until they lose their only son, Bobby in a tragic

drowning while on vacation in Alaska. Robert desperately wants to move on with their lives while Jenna is trapped in a constant state of despair as the accident happened while she was with Bobby. The stress proves too much for Jenna and she flees her marriage and life in Seattle to visit her grandmother's hometown in Alaska which just happens to be located near the Thunder Bay Resort, the location of her son's death.

Raven Stole the Moon follows Jenna's journey in Alaska and Robert's journey to find her. Jenna is mysteriously drawn to Alaska. She has a sense that there is something unfinished concerning her son's death. Is it because his body was never found or is it guilt eating at her that she didn't do everything she could to save him? While touring the town of Wrangell, she has what seems like supernatural encounters and the feeling that things are not what they appear. Jenna learns of the beliefs and legends of the Tlingits, the North American Indian tribe that was her grandmother's, concerning the kushtaka, shape-shifting otter-like creatures that have been known to lure people to their deaths and transform them into a fellow kushtaka. Could this be what happened to her son? Is this why Jenna seems to be seeking out answers?

I really did enjoy my time spent with *Raven Stole the Moon*. There were elements of magic and mystery, shape-shifters and shamans, romance and a violence (nothing shocking). The characters are interesting and the dialogue between them really lends to the overall "feeling" of the book. The edition I read was actually a release of a new edition of the book which was originally published in 1998. In the afterword, author Garth Stein explains his relief that he felt he did not need to rewrite large parts of his original version including the lack of technology (pretty amazing a time without cell phones and the internet) and I am glad that he left things pretty much as is. I believe a story should be kept true to it's original form.

I was very excited to have this opportunity to review this release (offered by Sarah from Terra Communications Book Marketing). As I am an Enzo fan - Enzo being the star of Mr. Stein's extremely popular and wonderful *The Art of Racing in the Rain* - I was very curious to see how Mr. Stein's first work compared. Both books featured very believable and realistic characters but I do believe the author's writing has gained a better voice and has evolved. *Raven Stole the Moon* is an engaging book with a great appeal.

Please visit Mr. Stein's website, follow him on twitter, or join him on Facebook and MySpace.

Vivian says

In Garth's first book, he explores the folk lore of Alaska and a woman in search of herself and answers after the death of her son has torn her family apart. This book goes into fantasy, which I normally don't read but with it based on tribal lore, makes it a wonderful story to read. Garth is just a born writer and gets better as he goes. Look for all his books, they will be different but they will be great reads, always with something to take away from them.

Ti says

The Short of It:

Raven Stole the Moon is almost like reading two novels, side by side. There's the everyday, here and now part of it, and then there's the other part that centers around mysterious Native American legends and shapeshifters. At times, it's a wild ride.

The Rest of It:

Raven Stole the Moon is not a new book for Stein. In fact, it was first published back in 1998, but after his success with *The Art of Racing in the Rain*, his publisher decided to release this new edition of *Raven Stole the Moon*. However, when I first picked it up, I believed that this was a new book so I was a tad surprised when I came upon the afterward in the book and was told that it wasn't.

I had mixed feelings over this book.

The first half of the book worked for me. Jenna and her husband, Robert, experience what I believe, has got to be the hardest thing to get through; the death of a child. Jenna is grief-stricken, lost and confused and looking for closure. Stein does an excellent job of communicating that feeling of loss to me. Plus, I liked her a lot. She is easily someone who I could be friends with. When she arrives in Wrangell, Alaska she is sort of like flotsam in the sea. She just sort of drifts between point A and point B. When she lands into the arms of Eddie, their attraction is obvious.

As we learn more about the circumstances of her son's death, we are introduced to the Kushtakas. The legends of the Tlingit center around shapeshifters that are part man, part otter. These Kushtakas are soul-stealers. They change shape to lure you in. Once captured, you spend the rest of eternity as one of them. So in essence, your soul is never at rest.

The introduction to this legend intrigued me, but by the end of the book, much of it seemed far-fetched. I felt as if the novel was pulling in two different directions. Part of it wanted to stick to the relationship aspect between Jenna, her husband, and Eddie. The other part wanted to focus on the ancient legends but the two never really came together for me. I think it would have been a more powerful read, had a bit more time been spent on the ending to blend the two together.

I will say this, this novel is quite different from anything I've ever read. If you enjoy reading about Native American legends and can appreciate the spiritual aspect of the novel, you will enjoy this book. Also, Stein has a way with characters. Their mannerisms, their likes and dislikes, the way they use language, all come together to form real flesh and blood.

Source: This ARC was provided by Terra Communications.

Meg says

Garth Stein's *Raven Stole The Moon* is a contemporary novel set against an interesting backdrop: the beliefs and ancient folklore of the Tlingit people. As Jenna traipses through Wrangell and meets an interesting cast of characters — including Oscar, a dog who suddenly follows her everywhere, and Eddie, a man who befriends and shelters her, no questions asked — we begin to learn of a supernatural phenomenon which is intriguing and spooky. What did happen to Bobby?

I'm one of the few people in the world who has not read Stein's *The Art Of Racing In The Rain*, so his writing style was completely new to me. Characterized by short sentences, his prose comes out in a staccato-like rhythm that took a little getting used to. It certainly wasn't bad, but I wasn't accustomed to getting the stream-of-consciousness-like details the author shared with us. Told in third person but focused primarily on Jenna and her viewpoint, the book hammered out important tidbits in a style pretty distinct to Stein.

I didn't find the book to be the "horror" story some claim, but nor is it a tepid tale of family or forgiveness. It's something in between. Relying plenty on religious and supernatural elements and requiring the reader to suspend disbelief for a sizeable chunk of the story, *Raven Stole The Moon* was a riveting novel — and even

though I didn't particularly like Jenna or Robert, I was unable to put the book down. It's pretty rare that I'm so apathetic to two of the main characters and still enjoy the novel. Why? Because though I didn't feel for them, I felt with them — and I knew that, in the wake of their son's death, how could I judge them? I couldn't. And didn't. I just read their story through as unbiased a lens as I could.

Originally published in 1998, the book maintains a sort of innocence before the dawn of Google searches and iPhones. As Jenna disappears from the lush, dull world she inhabits in Washington, we're able to remember how much easier it was to "go off the grid" before we were all accessible 24/7 via devices we keep in our pockets and palms. Stein notes in the afterword that he could have changed the timeframe and updated these references but chose not to, and I agree with the decision to keep the book firmly rooted in the late 1990s. It made me feel — dare I say it? — nostalgic.

Fans of contemporary fiction with a heavy mysterious, supernatural element will find plenty to enjoy here, and probably much for discussion. Though I was happy with the book's resolution for the most part, those closing pages? Makes me wonder...

B.reader says

Warning--mild spoilers.

I'm conflicted about this book. At first I really, really liked it. The first hundred pages were so intense and creepy that I actually got freaked out and had to stop reading so I would be able to sleep instead of laying awake clutching at my covers in terror. Stein does have a gift of creating some very intense imagery and can write atmosphere very well.

However, I have two major issues with the book. First is more mechanics than story...I thought that much of the writing was just plain awkward. Stein didn't really seem like he knew what style he wanted throughout the book. Sometimes his descriptions were lush, and other times they were extremely sparse. I think that the story could have been better served through consistency in style. Furthermore, his sentence construction at times was just plain awkward. I always hate when I automatically revise sentences structures in my head, as it takes me out of the story--and I was doing that quite often with this book.

The second major issue I have --this is where potential spoilers come in-- is with the characters. I kind of hated them. A lot. Skilled authors can often take a character that is unlikeable and still make a compelling story about them, but Stein was unable to do this for me. While I started out liking Jenna, the second half of the book make me despise her. The areas of the story that focused on her grief and confusion were good, but then all of a sudden she wants to jump in bed with a stranger, which I felt was completely out of character. Additionally, she's completely ridiculous when it comes to sleeping with Eddie. I wanted to slap her when she was like, "oh, sleep with me but don't expect anything from me and you're rude if you don't like that." Throughout the whole book I thought Robert was repulsive and wanted him to get hit by a bus...but by the end of the book I thought the two totally deserved each other.

Jennifer Conner says

Jenna lost her son, Bobby, in a tragic drowning while on a business-related vacation with her family at a soon-to-be-opened wilderness lodge. Two years later at home with her husband Robert in Seattle, Jenna has yet to recover. She's seen numerous psychiatrists, but has yet to come to terms with Bobby's death and the

changes their loss made to their marriage. After a fight at yet another business related event, Jenna takes off in Robert's car. At first she just wants to get home. In the end, she just keeps driving, running away from Robert by default. Eventually, she ends up headed on the ferry to Alaska, the home of her Tlingit grandmother and the place where Bobby died. Can returning to the source of so much pain in her life help her move forward, or will it send her further into depression and despair?

The first half of this novel had all the makings of "The X Files." After Jenna lands in Alaska after leaving Robert, she has the most creepy experiences. Because she doesn't completely trust her sanity, she's not sure if she believes what she sees. What she may have experienced is creepy and kept me on the edge of my seat. I loved the potential of kushtaka, the otter people gifted with the ability to shift their shape and "convert" souls. When Jenna wonders if the kushtaka are real and if they may have some connection to the death of her son, I could just imagine Mulder and Scully investigating and having a field day with all the possibilities. During that first half, I was in heaven. I felt that I could relate to Jenna and I wanted her to find her way to where ever it was that she needed to go.

The second half of the novel didn't work as well for me. I grew impatient with Jenna and her attitude about anyone other than herself. The story became much less suspenseful because it featured Robert and his attempts to find Jenna more prominently. This weighted the novel down and was distracting. I wanted the novel to be about Jenna and her discoveries. I wasn't so much concerned about Robert. It's not that he didn't matter, but I wish there could have been more a more concise way to bring him back into the story without the play by play. Robert also put enough normalcy and reality back into the story that when the kushtaka arc built back up, I missed it. I was no longer prepared for it. Had I recognized it immediately, the end of this novel really would have packed a punch.

My Final Thoughts

I didn't like this novel as much as *The Art of Racing in the Rain*. However, *Raven Stole the Moon* was more challenging and in some ways more interesting. I enjoyed the Alaskan setting, history, and spirituality that were infused throughout. I liked that Jenna and Robert were a mess and were prone to making rotten decisions when under stress. It made them human. The highlight for me was the section where Jenna relives her last moments with Bobby. They were incredibly heartbreaking and powerful. Had Stein maintained the same pacing and level of suspense consistently throughout, this novel would have been absolutely incredible.
